

16 October 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT : How Forthcoming is Thieu Prepared to be on the Release
of Political Prisoners which the GVN Now Holds?

1. The answer to this question depends almost wholly on the context of the negotiated settlement of which ~~the~~^a release of political prisoners would be a part. If the context included a cease-fire in place now -- when most of the main roads around Saigon are interdicted or insecure -- Thieu would almost certainly grasp at any issue which would help him resist a ~~cease-fire~~^{cease-fire}. He would argue that the release of political prisoners would make a bad situation ~~worse~~ worse, since these prisoners would immediately begin engaging in political activity against him. He would further argue that these dangerous individuals ~~would~~ find safe-haven and a base of operations in areas (given to the Communists by the cease-fire) on the very outskirts of Saigon.
2. On the other hand, if a negotiated settlement and cease-fire occurred at a time when the GVN's territorial situation, particularly around Saigon, looked as good as it has for most of the past three years -- and if the other provisions

seemed to be favorable or at least not unfavorable to the GVN -- then Thieu would probably take a considerably more relaxed approach to the matter of releasing political prisoners. In sum, a definitive answer to this question is impossible unless one knows what the other terms of a negotiated settlement are likely to look like.